

**Opening the Unit:** The unit will open with a presentation on the Shakespearean time period and the main topics that shaped the art and culture of the Renaissance period. The presentation focuses largely on the shakeup of the Catholic Church, the increasing literacy rates and spread of information, and the rebirth of art, philosophy, and existential questions.

**Materials:** Powerpoint (30 minutes), “A Day in the Life of an Elizabethan” second person perspective story.

**Daily Expectations:** Students will have read and completed their nightly reading assignments. The assignments require students to read scenes for homework and complete the questions/essays for that night. This will allow class time to be spent on reviewing the scenes, allow the teacher to draw connections and teach deeper insight into the play during class time, and this will also allow this play to be completed in two weeks.

**Unit Expectations:** Students will review Hamlet in class but also take on the responsibility of translating and analyzing on their own at home. The journal questions must be typed and brought to class when assigned. The final assessments will require students to submit their work to turnitin.com.

**Turnitin.com Class Identification Code**

**A: 6832022**

**C: 6832032**

**G: 6832247**

Day One: Introduction

Day Two: Quiz on Powerpoint and review of information from introduction. Packets distributed and expectations reviewed. Students will read and answer first scene questions in class. Homework: complete Act I, ii-iii

Day Three: Homework: Act I, iv-v

Day Four: Homework: Act II, i and min/max paper

Day Five: Show scene from movie. Homework: Act II, ii

Day Six: In class quiz: Provide students with the “O what a rogue and peasant slave I am” speech and give them a timed analysis quiz. Spend time reviewing the scene and how it reveals Hamlet’s hesitancy to commit murder. Homework Act III, i-ii and to write an AB/AB love poem.

Day Seven: Homework Act III, iii-iv

Day Eight: Show the play scene followed by Hamlet/Gertrude scene. Homework Act IV

Day Nine: Show Ophelia scene, Homework: Act V and min/max paper

Day Ten: Review the final action scene. Discuss blame and innocence. Identify extended essay topics.

***Hamlet***

**Introduction to the *Hamlet***

The writer of any play has a lot of responsibilities in the beginning of the play. Further, a play writer who is presenting for an 16th century audience in the countryside of England would have even more pressure to ‘hook’ their audiences quickly since throwing rotten fruit and uncontrollable mobs could destroy a writer’s reputation before the end of scene one. As we enter into arguably the most famous Shakespearean tragedy, *Hamlet*, you will learn to identify a number of important and purposefully placed clues that will help familiarize you to what’s ahead. The sooner you can understand the conflict, the background that led to the conflict, and the main character’s agenda, the better you will be at extending beyond the basic plot and into analyzing the deeper aspects of the play that makes Shakespeare such an iconic writer.

**Act I, i**

1. Identify lines that develop the setting of the scene. List specific parts of lines that clue the reader into the time of day, season, weather, location, etc. What can one infer from these lines?

2. The first scene also needs to establish who these people are who are talking. What specific lines suggest that Horatio holds a higher status than Marcellus or Bernardo? What can one infer from these lines?

3. One of the interesting parts of Shakespeare’s delivery style is that he does not introduce the main characters of the play immediately. Instead, he has other characters share their knowledge and opinion of the characters as a kind of ‘introduction’. What does Horatio share about the former King of Denmark (Hamlet the first)?

4. Right away Shakespeare is playing around with a topic that has gained a lot of attention during the beginning of the Renaissance. ***The Walking Dead***. Audiences who have struggled with their faith would be especially intrigued by the idea that a man could ‘return’ from the dead. Perhaps this person could answer their questions for them, relieve them of all this confusion. However, while fascinated, their curiosity would be tempered by the general belief that nothing good comes from someone returning from the dead. Besides proving that Shakespeare knew exactly what his audience was hungry for, this is also a pretty good sign of foreshadowing. Look back through the first scene and identify any other subtle signs or specific lines of dialogue that suggest an ominous future.

**Act I, ii**

**Introduction:** Shakespeare quickly moves the audience to viewing an entirely different scene. While we begin the play with the haunting image of the ‘old’ king, the second scene begins with a boisterous announcement from the ‘new’ king, who just happens to be the old king’s brother. Awkward? You bet.

Hamlet is not just a play about one conflict. There are many conflicts in this kingdom, but more importantly, there is mounting pressure outside the kingdom’s walls also. Shakespeare creates a bit of a pressure cooker scenario here that is important to note because the outside conflict is largely ignored by the people inside the castle. (This, you will find, is a pretty big mistake.) The king’s speech intends to address the state of the kingdom while carefully touching on his recent marriage to the dead king’s wife and granting leave to those who returned for the funeral. All this is really interesting, especially if you look at his word choice in describing the mixed emotions of the moment. However, it’s not the king’s speech that audiences should pay attention to but rather, young Hamlet’s stoic reaction to his new ‘dad’.

1. Hamlet appears quite upset when his mother asks why his father’s death ‘seems’ so particular with him. Consider what the word ‘seems’ means by definition. Then, explain why Hamlet is so offended with her use of that word. What does this interaction on page 9 suggest about Hamlet’s present relationship with his mom?

2. Hamlet’s new step dad, Claudius, sees an opportunity to offer some fatherly advice. Read his words carefully and translate one line in particular that you believe Hamlet could find offense in given his current state of mind

3. In Hamlet’s soliloquy we see the truth of how Hamlet is feeling. His language is filled with imagery, interruption due to emotion, and a painful admission that remembering is just too difficult. Break this soliloquy up into parts. Separate the parts by Hamlet’s thought process and identify what each part of the soliloquy reveals about how Hamlet feels.

**Act I, iii**

**Introduction:** Scene three is going to once again totally change scenes to entirely different characters. These characters are not royalty but have had a relationship to serving the kingdom. The father, Polonius, is the present advisor to the new king and his son Laertes is a dutiful overprotective brother who doesn’t want to see his very young sister fall into the clutches of any bad guy, even if that bad guy is the heir to the throne, prince Hamlet.

1. What are Laertes specific reasons for not approving of his sister’s relationship with Hamlet? Cite the exact lines and translate what they mean.

2. One of the major contradictions of Elizabethan society was that the people who were supposed to be the most reverent and yet, were often neck deep in scandal and corruption. Polonius is just the type of character Elizabethan audiences recognized. He talked a good talk, but as we will soon find out, his own ambitions will prevent him from putting any of these words into practice. What are the 8 pieces of advice that Polonius instructs his son before he departs?

3. At the end of the scene, the obedient Ophelia agrees to ‘obey’ her father. What exactly has he asked her to do?

**Act I, scene iv and v**

**Introduction:** In these scenes, we meet learn a couple things about Hamlet. We realize he is a bit longwinded in his philosophical discussions and that his friends, while having good intentions, can’t really connect with him on conjectures of good and evil, life and death. However, that is not to say that Horatio is dim witted. In fact, it is Horatio that warns Hamlet that this ghost might be dangerous to Hamlet. The end of this act, scene four, reveals the major conflict of the play and catapults the audience into Act II.

1. Translate Horatio’s warning for Hamlet not to follow the ghost. This part of the scene reflects the general feelings that audiences would have towards ghosts and spirits of this time period.

2. The ghost’s message to Hamlet is a catalyst for the action in the rest of the play. As he explains that he was, in fact, murdered, he shares that the actual murder wasn’t the worst part. Instead, it was ‘when’ he was murdered that made his eternity so *“horrible”*. Find the lines that address this point and explain what religious custom this calls upon.

3. When before Hamlet didn’t want to remember his father, now, he swears to never forget. Why? What is he hoping the recalling of his father’s memory will do for him?

4. Shakespeare opens up the audience’s imagination that **anything** can happen in this play with one very important exchange between Hamlet and Horatio. *“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”* How would the common man of the time period and religious clergy respond to this line differently?

**Act II, i**

**Introduction:** The beginning of this act is going to begin with a rather minor scene of Polonius sending a man to France to help out his son. This certainly suggests that Polonius does not have much faith in his own son’s decision making and ability to not embarrass himself in public. Meanwhile, Ophelia enters to share a really interesting story about her now ‘x’ boyfriend.

1. Look carefully at Ophelia’s retelling of the interaction. Note the silence and focus on the communication delivered in the body movements. Remember these are the words of a play so imagining how this scene would be acted out based on these stage directions can be helpful here. Take each motion into deep consideration and analyze what you think Hamlet was trying to tell her in this scene. Support your analysis with specific line support.

**\*One page min/max**

**Act II, ii**

**Introduction:** In this scene we meet two knucklehead characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Many people, like Polonius, are willing to do all kinds of favors for the newly crowned king as a way to benefit their own name, and these two are no different.

1. What is the favor the two agree to perform for the king and queen?

2. Could there be another reason why Claudius wants Hamlet watched? Of course. Explain.

3. What is ironic about Polonius’s claim that “brevity is the soul of wit”?

4. Look carefully at Hamlet’s poem to Ophelia. What does this poem reveal about the true nature of their relationship?

5. Polonius takes part in the plan to spy on Hamlet. Based on the conversation between the two, do you believe that Hamlet is onto the plan? Cite specific lines and discuss what these lines imply.

5. In what ways could Hamlet feel like “Denmark is a prison”?

6. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are possibly the worst audience to open up to, Hamlet doesn’t have many other options. He reveals his existential concerns in the famous ‘What a piece of work is a man’ speech. What deep thoughts does this speech reveal about how Hamlet is feeling inside? What people in his life do you think contributed to his questioning of life’s purpose?

7. The end of Act II shows Hamlet jealous of the actors who can act sad and then so quickly act happy. He wishes he could force his soul to so easily feel this way or that. But that is not all this important speech covers. Break this speech into parts and decipher the focus of each part. After identifying the topics in his soliloquy, associate an emotion with each part. If you were to have an actor act this scene out, what emotion would you expect the actor to emphasize in each part?

**Analyze in your book or on this paper.**

Now I am alone.

O, what a [rogue](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/rogue.html) and [peasant slave](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/peasant.html) am I!   
Is it not [monstrous that this player here,   
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit   
That from her working all his visage wann'd,   
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,   
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting   
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!  
For Hecuba!](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/monstrous.html)   
What's [Hecuba](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/hecuba.html) to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do,   
Had he the motive and the [cue for passion](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/cue.html)   
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
[Make mad the guilty](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/makemad.html) and appal the free,  
Confound the ignorant, and [amaze](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/amaze.html) indeed   
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,   
A dull and [muddy-mettled](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/muddymettled.html) rascal, [peak](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/peak.html),   
Like [John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/johnadreams.html),   
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,   
Upon whose property and most dear life   
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?   
Who calls me villain? breaks my [pate](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/pate.html) across?   
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?   
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,   
As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?   
Ha!   
['Swounds](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/swounds.html), I should take it: for it cannot be but I am [pigeon-liver'd](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/pigeonlivered.html) and lack gall   
To make oppression bitter, or ere this   
I should have fatted all the [region kites](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/regionkites.html)   
With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, [kindless](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/kindless.html) villain!   
O, vengeance!   
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,   
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,   
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,   
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,   
And fall a-cursing, like a very [drab](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/drab.html),   
A [scullion](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/scullion.html)!   
Fie upon't! foh! About, my brain! I have heard   
That guilty creatures sitting at a play   
Have by the very cunning of the scene   
Been struck so to the soul that presently   
They have [proclaim'd their malefactions](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/malefactions.html);  
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak   
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father  
Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;  
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but [blench](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/soliloquies/blench.html),   
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen   
May be the devil: and the devil hath power   
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps   
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds   
More relative than this: the play 's the thing   
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

**Act III, i**

**Introduction:** The beginning of the act shows the limitless possibilities that the queen and king have for using the classes below them to their own advantage. In this case, Ophelia now becomes their dutiful servant in their quest to uncover the reason behind Hamlet’s recent change in behavior. The stage direction in this part of the play can be misleading though. It is important to note that nobody is in the room when Hamlet begins talking. Ophelia will ‘happen’ upon him in a couple minutes.

1. Translate the “To be or not to be speech” line by line in order to fully understand the meaning of each word and line.

2. After thoroughly understanding Hamlet’s discussion with himself regarding life and suicide, should one conclude that Hamlet is crazy, emotionally loosed, unstable, or even mentally incompetent?

3. Some would call the feelings Hamlet has towards Ophelia to be ‘complicated’. Look carefully at the exchange between the two of them. What does this scene reveal about Hamlet?

**Act III, ii**

**Introduction:** This scene serves as one of the most anticipated scenes in all of Shakespeare’s plays, the long awaited play within a play scene. While observing the somewhat predictable actions of the players is interesting, the real character to watch is Hamlet.

1. How would you describe Hamlet’s interaction with Ophelia in this scene? Use three direct lines from the scene to support yourself.

2. Hamlet uses a creative comparison to describe Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when speaking with them. Explain this analogy by using direct lines.

3. What does Hamlet mean when he says, “Now, could I drink hot blood”?

4. At this point, you have translated and analyzed a number of lengthy passages by characters. Now, you are going to use direct quotes to support your analysis of the king’s soliloquy. Read the speech and draw a conclusion as to the purpose this area of the play serves for the audience.

5. Why doesn’t Hamlet kill the king at this very opportune moment?

6. For a person who is not religious and has been clearly questioning life’s purpose and God’s existence, Hamlet has now twice been stopped because of a religious convention. Why? What does this mean?

**Act III, iv**

**Introduction:** One of the most specific messages the ghost ordered before leaving Hamlet back in Act I was for Hamlet not to harm his mother. Yet, Hamlet is absolutely overwhelmed with emotion when alone with his mother. His words are direct, hurtful, and yet, it appears as though his approach may have worked in getting through to his mother’s conscience. Well, maybe.

1. Identify Hamlet’s greatest concerns with his mother’s decision to marry his uncle.

2. The reason the ghost appears is not the same reason Hamlet thinks the ghost has appeared. What is the difference?

3. Identify the lines that explain what Hamlet specifically asks his mother to do for him now that she is part of his ‘plan’.

4. As a show of loyalty, Gertrude makes a promise to Hamlet. Find that promise and explain exactly what she assures Hamlet with these words.

5. Consider reasons why Gertrude would marry her husband’s brother so quickly after her husband’s death.

**Act IV, i-iv**

**Introduction:** The scene immediately following Hamlet’s conversation with his mother shows Hamlet as highly charged and much changed from the solemn character he played in the beginning of the play. He reveals his wit and dark humor in a rather telling scene where he and the king talk about his immediate departure from Denmark.

1. Why doesn’t Hamlet take this opportunity to reveal to the gathered crowd that Claudius is a murderer?

2. This scene speaks volumes to what the common people of Shakespeare’s audience would have always assumed about the ‘royal’ justice system. What exactly is Claudius’s thought process to not charge Hamlet with murder?

**Act IV, v**

**Introduction:** It’s important to pay attention to how the king and queen treat people when they want them to perform a specific task for them, but once the task is complete, the friendship and protection are over. Polonius died and while the fact bore very little effect on the royal family, the death crushes his daughter Ophelia who now really has nobody.

1. Look carefully at the Queen’s first words of this scene. Gertrude has very few lines in this play, and the ones she has provide insight into her agenda. At this point, what do you believe is Gertrude’s priority?

2. Laertes returns to the castle rightfully angry. However, his argument with Claudius is interrupted by his sister who has had a nervous breakdown. Yet, despite her seemingly erroneous language, the meaning behind her flowers reveals that she may, in fact, see the situation more clearly than her audience may think. Stage direction is absent in this part of the play, but based on your knowledge of the play, who do you believe she gives the different flowers to in this scene and for what reason?

**Act IV, vii**

**Introduction:** Up to this point, we have known that Claudius was accused of killing King Hamlet. However, the ‘ability’ to commit such a murder was always questionable because Claudius has not appeared as overtly manipulative. That is, until scene seven. Laertes is wild with anger and yet, by the end of the scene, Claudius has recruited Laertes to serve as one of his dutiful servants. The major focus for this scene is determining how exactly Claudius succeed in controlling Laertes.

1. What does Laertes want more than anything and how does Claudius promise to fulfill this desire? Find direct lines to support yourself.

2. At one point, Claudius targets Laertes youthful ego. Explain Claudius’s approach here.

3. How does this plan ultimately serve Claudius on many levels?

4. Ophelia does not die in a lake or a river. The body of water is described as a ‘weeping brook’. What is the significance of mentioning that she drowned in something so shallow?

**Act V, i**

**Introduction:** Act V of any Shakespeare play is the climax of the conflict and this act in Hamlet is an exceptional example of Shakespeare’s best final scenes. Because the act is so much anticipated and the anxiety is at an all-time high, Shakespeare pulls the reader back a bit with a comic relief to start the act. The scene begins with grave diggers working in a cemetery. Their very unsympathetic way of tossing bones around the yard draws the attention of Hamlet who is returning home. And at this point, even Horatio knows he will not be able to stop his friend from philosophizing about the fine line between life and death.

1. What specifically fascinates Hamlet about one particular skull in the graveyard?

2. What does Hamlet realize about all humans, even the great ones like Caesar and Alexander?

3. Why does Hamlet pick an argument with Laertes at the grave of Ophelia?

**Act V, ii**

1. What has become of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

2. Hamlet’s approval of the duel, his refusal to heed Horatio’s warnings, and his conversation about the fall of a sparrow reveal a change in Hamlet’s personality. Since he began this play depressed, questioning life’s purpose and reason, how would you describe his attitude now, especially towards God and his own life? What is Hamlet ‘not’ talking about anymore? Why? Support with specific lines. **\*One page min/max**

3. In his apology to Laertes for killing his father, what does Hamlet use as his excuse? Find the specific line. Why is this confession confusing and now, should the reader believe Hamlet is ‘mad’?

4. Find the line that shows that Laertes has a change of heart in mid duel that ‘almost’ shows Laertes is not built for murder.

5. The fact that Fortinbras walks right into the castle and takes it over is supposed to remind royal families of what valuable lesson in ruling a kingdom?

**Extended Essay Topics**

1. Throughout this play, Shakespeare relies on biblical and mythological allusions in the play because he knows that even uneducated audiences members would have been familiar with these figures. Take a close look at his use of these references and analyze the impact the comparison has on the understanding of the scene or the understanding of the character speaking.

2. Religion was a hotly debated topic of the time period and is certainly a large part of this play. If art reflects life, what is Shakespeare suggesting about the state of faith at this time?

3. There is a definite pattern of the upper class taking advantage of the lower class for their own gain. What are the implications of this pattern and is this a true representation of how royal families operated during this time period?

4. Who are the real victims of this play?

5. In the beginning of the play, Horatio warns Hamlet that often the devil will take on a ‘pleasing shape’ in order to tempt men ‘toward the flood’. Now that the play is over, how should audiences view the ghost?

6. In what ways does Shakespeare appeal to the common man in this play?

**Renaissance Feast**

In celebration of the Renaissance time period and our classroom community, we will take part in a Renaissance picnic right here in class. This will require all students to play the role of their selected ‘class’ of people and bring in food that would be appropriately available for that class. Over lunch (day is on calendar), we will have a number of celebratory events and enjoy a meal together.

**King and Queen:** Highest average male and female student in the class. They are responsible for writing a toast for the group that shows off their wit, their education, and their ability to play on words. The king and queen will be offered food from all the classes.

**The Upper Class:** Made up of clergy, land owners, and merchants, this group would have access to the most delectable foods including: red meats, hunted fowl like quail or turkey, tropical fruits, exotic teas, soft cheeses, soft breads, stews filled with various vegetables, and on occasion, noodles. Their desserts would not only taste sweet (since they have more access to sugar), they would look terrific.

**The Middle Class:** Made up of farmers, blacksmiths, bakers, stone carvers, builders, textile workers, this group would have just enough food to feed their family. If they did have money for meat, they would have eggs, chicken, duck, rabbit, or fish. Their fruits and vegetables would rely on the season but largely be made up of potatoes, apples, carrots, berries, cabbage, and other garden vegetables. Their soups would have little if any meat in them and they would use home baked hard rolls to soak up the soup. They would make their sweet treats out of honey, nuts, and fruit which could make up wonderful jams, jellies, pastries, or pies.

**The Lower Class:** This group would be made up of beggars, the elderly, immigrants, and handicap. They would need to rely wholly on the good hearts of the community and church to ‘hopefully’ gather some sustenance every day. Because they were in competition with each other, they would use a talent to draw attention and sympathy. This talent could include amazing use of flattery, singing, performing, trading ‘interesting’ collectables, or reciting beautiful poetry.

**Points: 20**

You will earn points for bringing in a food dish and playing your part in the meal’s interesting class dynamics.

All dishes require an AB/AB poem introduction as well as recipe of ingredients.

Within your group, you will need something to identify the group as the same class.